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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, ...)): Colleagues, can we bring this meeting to order, please?

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), in the study of situations in Somalia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, we're going to start off with witnesses from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. Before us is Marc-André Fredette, Director General, Southern and Eastern Africa Bureau; Susan Greene, Director, South Sudan Development Division; Jean-Bernard Parenteau, Director, West and Central Africa Division; and last but not least, Nicolas Simard, Ambassador, Embassy of Canada to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Welcome to all of you.

I'm not sure who is starting, but I think it's Mr. Fredette. We'll turn the floor over for opening comments and then, as is the normal practice, colleagues, we'll go into questions.

Mr. Fredette, please, the floor is yours.

Mr. Marc-André Fredette (Director General, Southern and Eastern Africa Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to speak here today. I'm pleased to provide an update on the situation in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia. I am accompanied by my colleagues you've just introduced: Susan Greene, Director for the South Sudan Development Division; our Canadian ambassador for the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nicolas Simard; and Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau, Director for the West and Central Africa Relations Division.

I would like, first, to outline the broader context and some key developments in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank, Africa will have six of the world's 10 fastest growing economies in 2018. A number of countries have made significant progress in areas such as health, education, and poverty reduction. Sub-Saharan Africa also has the world's youngest population. With the right policies, the International Monetary Fund estimates that the continent could realize a demographic dividend that increases per capita GDP by up to 50% by 2050. In short, there is immense potential.

Stability and security are needed in order to fully tap into this immense potential. In the case of South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia, ongoing challenges include protracted conflicts resulting in humanitarian needs, high levels of gender inequality, governance shortcomings, human rights violations, corruption, the impacts of climate change, forced displacement, and food insecurity.

South Sudan is the most fragile and among the poorest countries in the world. In 2013, only two years after the country's independence from Sudan, the country broke out into civil war. More recently, in December 2017, South Sudan's parties to the conflict signed a ceasefire as part of a revitalization process of a stalled peace agreement. However, violations of the ceasefire have been and continue to be far too frequent.

As a result of the protracted conflict, South Sudan is now the second largest source of displacement in Africa, after the Democratic Republic of Congo. More than 4.3 million people have been forced from their homes, representing a third of the country's population, with more than half taking refuge in neighbouring countries. More than seven million people remain severely food insecure. Despite the extraordinary humanitarian response when pockets of famine were identified in 2017, similar or worse conditions are expected in 2018.

Widespread human rights violations and abuses have been committed with impunity by all sides. Women and girls continue to bear the brunt of the conflict reflected in the extreme levels of sexual and gender-based violence and the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war.

[*Translation*]

The overall situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo is unfortunately similar. The eastern part of the country (Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu) has been grappling with an ongoing cycle of violence for more than 20 years. Three other regions are now also affected. As with South Sudan, the situation is having a significant impact on women and girls, who are especially vulnerable.

The humanitarian crisis in the DRC continues to be one of the longest-running and most complex in the world, with more than 13 million people requiring humanitarian assistance in 2018. The DRC recently surpassed South Sudan and became the country with the most displaced persons in Africa with approximately 4.4 million internally displaced persons and more than 700,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries.

The country is also experiencing a political crisis. The main causes are the postponement of the general elections, mistrust of President Joseph Kabila—who might try to hold onto power—and a disastrous economic situation. Despite some positive developments, such as the announcement that elections are to be held in December 2018, tensions remain very high.

The main opposition parties, civil society groups and most of the population have lost confidence in the country's institutions. In particular, they are demanding that democratic space be expanded, through respect for human rights, including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Moreover, the country's security forces are responsible for more than half of the human rights violations.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Somalia is at a critical phase in state-building. After decades of civil war and instability, the country, ranked the world's second most fragile state—I forgot to rank the Congo; it's sixth—concluded parliamentary and presidential elections in December 2016 and February 2017, respectively. The Government of Somalia is focused on addressing myriad challenges. These include widespread corruption, delivering essential services to citizens, long-standing regional grievances and clan dynamics, and the persistent threat from al Shabaab.

Despite gains made by the African Union Mission in Somalia, and by Somali forces, al Shabaab retains the intent and capability to strike security, governmental, and civilian targets. This was illustrated in the horrific attack last October in Mogadishu that killed over 500 people, the single deadliest attack in recent Somali history.

These challenges are compounding a dire humanitarian situation. Moreover, persistent drought conditions mean the continued threat of widespread famine. Conflict, instability, and four consecutive failed rainy seasons have left 6.2 million people, roughly one half of the population, in need of humanitarian assistance, and has resulted in widespread internal displacement. Moreover, some 875,000 Somalis continue to live as refugees in neighbouring countries.

Against this backdrop, conditions for Somali women and girls are among the most difficult in the world, the combined result of acute poverty, conflict, and a clan-based culture that promotes male hierarchy and authority. Women and girls suffer from one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world. An overwhelming majority of women aged 15 to 49 have undergone female genital mutilation.

The situation in these three countries has resulted in Canada's engagement on multiple fronts, using a range of diplomatic, humanitarian, development, and security tools. At the heart of our engagement is the well-being and promotion of women and girls, a Government of Canada priority.

Canada recognizes that there is an opportunity, working alongside partners, to help realize the potential that exists in these extremely fragile states and their people. Our engagement comprises principled diplomacy at national, regional, and international levels. This is complemented by our international assistance, which is designed to reduce poverty by promoting peace and stability, fostering inclusive governance, saving lives, and protecting human dignity.

South Sudan and the DRC are the eighth and thirteenth largest recipients of Canadian international assistance, $115 million and $91 million in 2016-17, respectively. In the case of South Sudan, we are among the top five country donors. In Somalia, we provided $31 million in 2016-17, principally in the form of humanitarian assistance. Our assistance to these three countries includes Canada's institutional support to multilateral agencies such as UNICEF, as well as regional institutions such as the African Union.

Mr. Chair, distinguished members, I will now elaborate on what Canada is doing specifically in these three countries.

On peace and security, Canada has a long history of supporting peace and security on the continent and of accompanying peace processes in the region. This includes our contributions to the UN's peacekeeping budget, to which Canada is the ninth largest contributor in assessed contributions. Our current engagement includes renewed support for peacekeeping as well as a special effort to deliver on the commitments outlined in Canada's national action plan on women, peace, and security.

In March, Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland announced $1.8 million to support the women, peace, and security agenda by preventing conflict-related sexual violence in Somalia, South Sudan, as well as Kenya. This includes working with Somali refugees in the Dadaab refugee camp.

Canada strongly believes that children should not be weapons of war. To this end, we support partners like UNICEF and the Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative in all three countries to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Canadian Armed Forces personnel are deployed to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS. In addition, in 2017-18 Canada provided $2.7 million in security and stabilization support to South Sudan. Our support is helping to build political constituencies for a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Canada has also been contributing to the United Nations Organization stabilization mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) since it was established in 1999.

[*English*]

In Somalia, Canada provides support to the UN Support Office in Somalia through our assessed contributions to the UN peacekeeping budget. Through our counterterrorism capacity building program, Canada is helping to provide Somalian police and security officials with relevant training to address terrorist threats. We have also partnered with local non-governmental organizations to target terrorist recruitment efforts among vulnerable populations.

[*Translation*]

I will now deal with governance and human rights.

Canada is also a leader in promoting inclusive governance and human rights, especially the rights of women and girls.

[*English*]

Canada, including our Minister of Foreign Affairs, has publicly expressed on numerous occasions our deep concern over continued gross violations of human rights in South Sudan. Furthermore, Canada has in place targeted sanctions against several South Sudanese individuals who've been involved in gross violations of human rights. This is in addition to the UN Security Council sanctions we implement against those threatening peace in South Sudan.

[*Translation*]

Canada is monitoring the political, security and human rights situation in the DRC very closely and capitalizes on opportunities to raise its concerns. Our efforts, which aim to encourage the democratic and peaceful transfer of power, respect for human rights and improvement in the security situation, have been made through press releases, as well as through our involvement in various international organizations.

Canada is also providing $10 million in funding from 2016 to 2020, to support a civic and voter education project designed to increase participation in the electoral process and in democratic life.

[*English*]

Somalia is in an important phase of building and strengthening its institutions. In line with this, Canada is supporting efforts by Somalian authorities to strengthen key economic institutions and implement sound microeconomic policies. This includes notably through a $2.5 million U.S. contribution to the International Monetary Fund's Somalia trust fund.

On human dignity, there can be no lasting and durable peace and stability without long-term sustainable and inclusive development. Canada's international assistance to South Sudan, the DRC, and Somalia seeks to help the poorest and most vulnerable populations, with the longer-term objective of building a more secure and sustainable future in the region.

Canada's assistance in South Sudan is focused on meeting the basic needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, particularly women and girls, while creating the conditions for durable peace and equitable development. This includes improving access to gender-sensitive health services, with a focus on promoting sexual and reproductive rights and fighting hunger by complementing the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance with the development of agricultural knowledge and skills. In addition, Canada has allocated $35 million to date, in 2018, to address humanitarian needs in the country.

[*Translation*]

In the DRC, our assistance is focused on gender equality, the rights of women and girls, combatting sexual and gender-based violence, health, protecting children, and promoting democracy. Canada has also allocated $39.5 million in humanitarian assistance for the DRC for 2018. This includes $2.5 million in emergency humanitarian aid to assist organizations that are fighting the outbreak of Ebola.

● (1550)

[*English*]

With the international community's support, Somalia has put in place a national development plan for the period 2017-19 for the first time in 30 years. Based on this plan, the New Partnership for Somalia was endorsed at the London Conference on Somalia last May, including by Canada. In April, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Minister Hussen, announced an additional $18 million to address drought and conflict-related humanitarian needs in Somalia, which brings Canada's allocation to $25 million to date this year. Canada is also a strong supporter of multilateral organizations, with significant programming in Somalia, especially in health and education.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I can assure you we are conscious of the numerous challenges that these countries must overcome, and we are working tirelessly to help their populations improve their situation by taking a multi-faceted approach in order to maximize our impact.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fredette.

Colleagues, we'll go straight to questions.

We'll start with Mr. Aboultaif, please.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'll start by asking about South Sudan.

We know the war broke in December of 2013, and there continued to be a conflict between President Kiir and Machar at that time. Eventually it led to a civil war around Juba. We know how much this conflict affected the whole situation. Somehow IGAD, which is the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, has reached a peace agreement of sorts to basically put things in perspective, and in 2015 the parties signed this agreement. To come to this arrangement, there were efforts by many countries that were involved and, we can imagine, provided some political support, besides some development and financial support.

Where was Canada in this whole thing? Did Canada exist in supporting those efforts? Has Canada played a significant role? Can you name the countries that were more involved in getting this agreement?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: Your analysis is quite right. However, frankly, it's becoming more complicated. There has been a succession of agreements and signatures on peace agreements. There's never been a fulsome, comprehensive agreement that was completely agreed to and completely implemented.

Going back to around last December, the last round was more promising, in the sense that it focused on a more stepwise approach. Let's start with a feasible and well-monitored ceasefire. Despite the horrors that unfold every day in South Sudan, considering the path of the last few years, this has been episodic but has been—the only way I can put this to you frankly is—less bad than previous years. In terms of the ceasefire, there continues to be a great deal of focus on this from the international community. Canada has been very involved in this. I hope you understand that very little of that is public, or can be public, because our best place in these things is to work behind the scenes.

I can certainly tell you, in respect for the office you represent, that we are very actively involved, particularly in some areas. In the most recent round that took place in Addis Ababa, the South Sudan Council of Churches got involved for the first time in a very proactive way to perform a form of mediation. South Sudan is a very religious country, despite the way some of them behave with each other. This is the point we had encouraged and facilitated—not directly, of course, but facilitated. Likewise, we are by far.... You ask anyone—if you look for optimism in Juba—about Canada's role in terms of ensuring that women are part of the peace process itself. We were the first to lead, with great support from other major international partners, in ensuring that women participate even in the discussions about how to create a fulsome, comprehensive peace agreement.

That's what should bear fruit, but frankly, it's going to be gradual. It will be laborious. We're also very involved, as you heard, on the question of child soldiers. Now there is, again, amidst a number of clouds, a few rays of sunshine. In recent months, if you follow the news on this, you will see that a number of child soldiers have been released, including quite recently—a couple of weeks ago.

It's a long, arduous path, but there is some modicum of progress and Canada is very involved behind the scenes. Our ambassador in Juba, who is not here with us today, also regularly travels through the region. He was present, in fact, behind the scenes in Addis Ababa, on the margins of this, to indeed facilitate and accompany, without being a party to the process.

What's increasingly difficult though, of course, is that there's a fragmentation among the players. You talked about the two historical big leaders, Kiir and Machar. What's happening now is increasing fragmentation within the clans. For instance, I was in Juba not too long ago. I was told they have 7,000 generals in a country of roughly 12 million people. I don't know how many the Canadian military has, but it means basically that you have roving gangs of militias who declare themselves to be an army and shift their alliances according to primarily economic interests, and sometimes ethnic and other resource-driven issues.

Secondly, you asked about other key players. Ethiopia is a significant player. They're the driving force behind the IGAD process, which is a regional organization. Where others play a role as well, Uganda has often played a role that's been, most of the time, quite useful. They host a huge number of South Sudanese refugees quite generously. Then you have other neighbouring countries who are involved in varying degrees and in various ways: Sudan, Egypt, and other countries in the region, such as Kenya.

● (1555)

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to speak to that point you made about Canada playing an important role behind the scenes but it's something that's best not discussed publicly. Perhaps we might have the opportunity for an in camera session at some point. I believe it's important, on issues of this sort, that the committee have an opportunity to be properly briefed if we're to provide recommendations to the government.

On to Somalia, how many Canadians, approximately, are there in Somalia at the present time?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: This is one of those magical questions to which there are two very different answers. A few dozen of them are actually registered, but our estimates are in the multiples of thousands because a number of dual citizens—likewise for the United States and the U.K. as these are the three largest diasporas in the world—go back to their country of origin to volunteer and work for, really, a pittance for the new, emerging government, or with local NGOs, or local civil society organizations. Many of them have gone back to start businesses or to open private hospitals and schools. They don't register with us, so we don't know the fulsome answer to your question.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

That's exactly why I asked this particular question, because in your report on Canada's involvement in Somalia there's no mention of the incredible work that's being done on the ground by the Somali Canadian diaspora. Perhaps, even more so than the Canadian government, it's the Somali Canadian diaspora that's making a difference on the ground.

I think this would also be quite informative. Do you have, perhaps, a table or a chart of all the various government officials in Somalia that would also indicate how many of them are Canadians?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: We know that six ministers of the Somali government are dual citizens of Canada, including some very significant ones dealing with the Ministry of Planning, for instance, and the minister of women's affairs, so there's a huge connection there.

To your previous point, I want to fully acknowledge that we absolutely agree with you. The two reasons that I didn't mention this was of course because I'm here to represent Global Affairs Canada so I can tell you what we do, and secondly, more importantly, we actually do not know.

We are trying. We reach out to these people all the time, by the way, but it's very informal. When I was in Mogadishu not too long ago, I saw a hospital with a little Canadian flag on it. I was told informally an anecdote that this is some Somali citizen who is a successful businessman in Toronto, who opened a heavily subsidized private hospital in the middle of Mogadishu, but we don't know how much money he put into it. We don't know exactly how many people they treat. We have very little information about that.

● (1600)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Sure.

Mr. Fredette, I'm actually quite encouraged to hear that you've visited Mogadishu. We don't have an embassy in Mogadishu. We work out of Nairobi. How often does our ambassador travel to Mogadishu?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: Our high commissioner in Nairobi, Ms. Sara Hradecky, travels quite frequently. I won't give you an average, because I would say in the past year it has vastly accelerated.

She came with me when I was there recently. Since the London conference, there's been a great deal of attention with regard to Somalia because, as I mentioned earlier in a somewhat pre-orchestrated manner, for the first time in 30 years there is something happening. It's incomplete, it's imperfect, but there's something significant happening, so we've been going in very frequently, subject to our security advisories. She's been there, I would say in the past year, almost once a month, or people from her staff also go.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

That's encouraging because, as you mentioned, there may be a real window of opportunity in what was a situation of warlordism and anarchy for decades. There's the potential to do a lot of work. We have human resources on the ground, in fact. There are a lot of Canadians on the ground. We took on this engagement of trying to rebuild the police force.

What sorts of resources are we putting into that, both monetary and human resources?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: Some of that of course is highly confidential, but it's certainly putting us in a good position compared with most other international partners in terms of not only the financial value of what we do, but.... I'm not here to wave the flag, but one thing I would add is that the RCMP has a reputation beyond what we realize here living in Canada.

I've spent much of my life abroad. It's also the quality of their training in terms of pragmatism, for instance, developing techniques such as community policing, which is something that is very well tested in Canada and which is highly valuable to our counterparts there. On your suggestion of in camera briefings later, if you want to have more details on the security-related investments and activities, we will be honoured to come back.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

We'll go to Ms. Duncan, please.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you.

My first questions will be about the DRC. My understanding is, you can correct me if I'm wrong, that there is some level of assistance going there for women's health, particularly maternal care and so forth.

What degree of assistance is Canada giving to address AIDS?

[*Translation*]

His Excellency Mr. Nicolas Simard (Ambassador of Canada to the Democratic Republic of Congo): Thank you for your question.

Mr. Chair, I am pleased to be here with you. If I may, I will speak in French, because I work in French a lot in the DRC.

As for the DRC, we have indeed received a lot of development assistance in the area of health, a priority for Canada. In fact, our assistance is intended to strengthen the DRC's health systems. Because the systems have been strengthened, we are able to find support for the fight against AIDS. It is therefore a more general approach that is the result of supporting the DRC's national health systems.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: As I understand, we're assisting women's clinics on diagnosis, but are we providing medicines?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Simard: That is an excellent question, and I thank you for it.

I must say that we have had projects to combat sexual violence in the DRC for a very long time. Through the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), with which we work, we have a one-stop centre that provides women victims of sexual violence not only with medical support such as medication, but also with psychological support, legal support and economic support with a view to putting them back into the economic life of the country.

To answer your question more specifically, the support for these clinics comes from the UNDP and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). There are also contributions in the form of medication.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: I've been trying to read and catch up as much as I can, and I'm concerned by what I read about Canadian arms dealers selling indirectly to South Sudan. I know my colleague on this committee put forward an amendment that was rejected to stop the indirect sales; that is, in other words, if you sell to the U.S. and then they in turn sell it on to a banned nation. What is happening with arms sales from Canada to South Sudan now? Is that still going on, even indirectly?

● (1605)

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: Our position is, and has been, systematically clear. Canada has never issued any permits for the export of military goods, including, for instance, armoured vehicles to South Sudan that have made the headlines. As well, Canada stands behind all existing international efforts to implement an arms embargo in concert with the international community.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I said "indirect sales".

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: Those things that are not under our purview, regulations, or legislation are exactly that.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Do we know if Canadian arms are still going into South Sudan, then?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: We have no way of knowing.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Apparently they were, and we weren't controlling them.

What can you tell me about what's going on with conflict minerals in the DRC?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Simard: Various minerals are at the source of the ongoing conflicts in the east of the country. These include gold and the 3T minerals, tin, tungsten and tantalum. A huge amount of work is being done to make the minerals traceable.

Let me give you an example. Last week, I was in Toronto where I met with Canadian companies working to ensure that minerals are traceable. A lot of work is being done so that, from the extraction, meaning from the person working in the mine, until the sales, the transactions and the exports to Canada, traceability is ensured through the use of software.

A development program called Impact is letting us work in a number of African countries, including the DRC. Through that program, we make sure that mineral exports have an ethical dimension.

That said, there is definitely still a major conflict in the east of the country. MONUSCO is currently reporting around 100 armed groups. Within those armed groups, extraction activities certainly also fund conflict activities. We are very aware of it and we are working with the OECD and with international partners to make sure that conflict minerals can be better traced.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'm very interested in all the aid that Canada is providing to Somalia. Correct me if I'm wrong. In 2016 it was $31 million, and then what I see in my materials is $18 million. I'm just wondering if there's a reason for the reduction, what the time period is over which that's being allotted, and what the impact the new feminist international assistance policy is having on changing the direction of assistance to Somalia.

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: For one thing, what we're referring to here is a combination of two different things in two different ways. First of all, we quoted fiscal year data, which referred to 2016-17 because those are the latest final confirmed numbers. That really addressed either the totality of our assistance or what we call our "development assistance" as distinct from humanitarian assistance.

Some of the more recent numbers I quoted for calendar 2018 are on humanitarian assistance, because those are much more recent and they are tracked immediately, whereas development assistance by its nature takes longer to track, because we're never sure on April 1 exactly how much we will have finished spending on the long-term development projects by March 31 of that fiscal year. That's basically the explanation.

If we take an average of all these things over the last five years, the pattern has been quite stable. It's mostly humanitarian assistance, responsive, of course, to things like climate shocks, which, as you know, are cyclical. We respond whenever there's a greater threat of famine, for instance.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

We will go to Ms. Vandenbeld, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you.

To address the issue raised by Ms. Duncan, I think the Arms Trade Treaty is going to go a long way to prevent the diversion of weapons, particularly in areas like DRC.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

My question goes to His Excellency Ambassador Simard and deals with the upcoming elections in the DRC.

I ran a program to promote dialogue between the political parties in the 2011 elections. We know that the elections were neither credible, nor transparent, nor fair. I was Country Director of the National Democratic Institute, the NDI. Now, I see exactly the same thing going on with the electoral records and the proposed voting machines, which contravene the law. How can we prevent the same problem from happening in this election?

I see that you have provided $10 million to increase voter participation. The last time, I proposed spending $100,000 to train observers for the political parties, but now, there are no observers.

After the election, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) gave $3 million to conduct an audit, but it was not able to be done for lack of evidence. Could Canada use those funds to train observers for the political parties, networks of women and clerics? There are networks that can do that in each little village.

If we do not know what the results of the vote look like, it is very difficult to say afterwards whether it was fair or not. At the moment, I am afraid that Mr. Kabila will put obstacles in the way of the international observers. He does not want humanitarian aid, and I believe that the observers will be blocked.

Would it be possible to begin the process now by making use of those funds?

Mr. Nicolas Simard: Thank you very much for your question, Ms. Vandenbeld.

The election situation in the DRC is indeed extremely complicated. That is nothing new. We saw it in 2006 and 2011 and we are seeing it again now. The elections were supposed to be held in 2016, and they have been postponed twice.

The issue is not only whether they will take place, but, as you said, whether they will be credible, transparent and fair. Above all, whether the Congolese people will have enough trust in the results to allow peace in the country. If they do not have that trust, holding the elections serves no purpose because they will cause conflict thereafter.

As for the voting machines, which the Congolese call "the cheating machines"—which gives you a good idea of how the people view them—they were a choice the government made. Personally, as an observer, I do not feel that the voting machines will be up to the task, and neither do the other international diplomats in the country. There will be 100,000 polling stations. The DRC is a huge country the size of western Europe. The size of the country, and the number of polling stations, is really hard to imagine. To be able to hold the elections with voting machines, hundreds of millions of dollars would need to have been invested, and the government does not seem to have the money. Above all, the order for the machines needed to be in last February, and that was not done. So I am a little sceptical about how the commitment of the Congolese government will turn out in reality. I actually get the impression that the use of the voting machines will be mixed with traditional paper ballots.

In terms of observation, we have a very interesting $10-million project with the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, the CENCO. The goal of this project is to help to train people for the elections, but also for observation. Ten thousand Congolese observers are being funded by the project and are in the process of being trained by the CENCO. A lot of women are part of the program as well. So I am very encouraged by that.

As regards the audit, as you know, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, or OIF, is in the process of conducting one, led by General Sangaré, who has a lot of experience in French-speaking Africa. A very positive aspect of the election audit is that the opposition parties, civil society and international organizations were able to participate directly. Voter registration was done incompletely and the fingerprints of eight million voters are not available, but the OIF is urging the government to rectify the situation before the elections.

There will also be a public audit of the voters' list, which will allow citizens to see the list and try to correct the errors in it.

● (1615)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Is Canada sending experts under the umbrella of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie?

Mr. Nicolas Simard: Canada is the OIF's second largest funder. The contribution is a significant one. That said, mostly African experts, especially Congolese, are on the ground there.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Would it be possible to send Canadian experts?

Mr. Nicolas Simard: We could consider that with the department and see what can be done.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to Mr. Sidhu.

Please roll that into one of the other questions.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all three for appearing in front of the committee today.

Mr. Fredette, talking about Somalia, you mentioned that 50% of the population is still fighting hunger and that we are putting enough money into it: $31 million in 2016 and then lately another $18 million.

Are we just putting a fish out there? Is there any chance in any sector that we can help them to fish so that they will be self-sustainable some day? What is your comment on that?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: First, I'd like to finish answering the earlier question, and I will weave it into this because one of the main things we can do in all three and in other similar countries, is to be very diligent in how we apply our feminist international assistance policy, but also our feminist foreign policy.

When you work in fragile, complex cases such as in these three countries, it's probably where it's most useful and most needed, because as I mentioned earlier, it's a combination in South Sudan, for instance, of making sure that women are engaged in the peace process. Likewise, in Somalia, when we work with civil society organizations or humanitarian assistance, we now have much more targeted operations that are aimed at women and girls who are inevitably the most vulnerable, the most victimized, in these sorts of situations.

It finishes answering your question, but it also addresses yours.

What more could we do in a place like Somalia in building development assistance to complement and eventually replace humanitarian assistance? It will require a number of things that are showing some promise, but it will take time. It will be a long, arduous path.

First, we need to have the rest of the job done in democratic institutions and political processes. What's happened in the last year is very encouraging and is the best we have seen in 30 years, but there is still another long part of the road. I quoted earlier that the last elections were not one person, one vote. That is on the agenda. It will make a difference in helping us have a fulsome government partner that has plans that are validated by a fulsome, democratic process, which is one of our requirements to do this kind of long-term development assistance with a partner.

Second, we need to finish constructing a modicum of stability. Much has been written in the past six months about al Shabaab being weakened, and by all evidence they have been weakened, but they still have great capacity for nuisance. Until some of that has been stabilized a lot of work is ongoing to reinforce and train and equip Somali police and military, etc., and not just by Canada. A lot of European countries are involved, especially the U.K., as well as the Americans. More of that needs to be done before we can equip hospitals or schools, and certainly an even longer time before we can send Canadian citizens, under our flag, to work in these risky conditions.

It takes me back to the comment that was made earlier about how we deeply respect the fact that on a volunteer basis a lot of dual citizens from Canada go and do things with their own money and at their own risk. But as guardians of the safety of our citizens who work for us either directly or indirectly in our assistance programs, the conditions are not there yet for us to "teach them how to fish", as you used the famous expression.

That said, we are doing some of that in those areas where we can do this kind of work, despite security and institutional constraints. I mentioned the $2.5 million U.S. that we worked through the IMF, for instance. I also mentioned earlier that one of the dual citizens, who is the Minister of Planning, is from here. We are working there to help create.... For instance, how would you create and run a finance ministry or a revenue ministry?

I met their Prime Minister when I was in Mogadishu, and his number one priority is to find a way to create a tax system—imagine, in this place—so they have money to start having their own health and education and other programs, to which we would then be able to contribute through long-term, constructive assistance.

● (1620)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: You touched a little bit on the democratic system, on the election looming in 2018, the presidential election. Are Canadians able to align themselves with the government so that we can have a better influence in the upcoming election, and with whoever wins the next election, so that we can work together with them?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: It's just a little bit early to tell. There's an important meeting in a few weeks, in fact, that will look at documenting what has happened since the London conference a year ago, what the next steps are, and how the international community can organize itself and be coordinated to see who is going to help with what. I can tell you that one area that will be under consideration is how we can help with things like democratic institutions.

You probably know that Somalia has a unique history related to its culture and clan system. This is something that they are debating among themselves—the relationship with some parts of what used to be the united country of Somalia: Puntland, Somaliland, and so forth. All of that is the subject of very heated debate now, and for us as foreigners, it would be highly improper to engage in how they're going to deal with that. However, we stand ready for when they do have common plans so that we can assist them in a variety of ways, including technical assistance and advice.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: This topic is for DRC. We have the ambassador here today.

In 2011, they finally landed on a constitution. Prior to that, they had a power-sharing agreement among all the parties, which sounds like a very familiar story that runs in certain countries around the world. It is unfortunate that after all that they got President Kabila. His term is supposedly supposed to end, and there is talk that he will be replacing himself with someone he can control and that protestors are on the ground and the situation is getting worse by the day.

Since we are always extending a hand on development and toward democratic institutions and other humanitarian aid, which we always come forward with in Canada, how much of an influence do we have on the country and on the politicians to really protect and respect the constitution and put democratic institutions in place? I think that is a secret recipe for such countries to make sure that.... When all the parties respect the constitution, we know that the conflict is... or at least we'll pull in one of those reasons or causes of conflict.

Can you, Ambassador, or anyone, advise us on this issue?

Mr. Nicolas Simard: Thank you very much for the question.

[*Translation*]

Clearly, the political and democratic situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo is very complex. For quite some time, Canada has been involved in strengthening institutions, at least in supporting inclusive governance in the country. Obviously, we are not alone in that.

But Canada is playing an important role in the DRC. We are providing quite substantial development assistance. Last year, 2016-2017, we spent $91 million on that goal. We provide the money only to the United Nations and to Canadian and international NGOs. Not a cent goes to the Congolese government.

As for the influence we can have in strengthening institutions and having the country adhere more to its constitution, we are exerting diplomatic pressure, as a power that is likely to bring together the positive influences, if I may put it that way, of a number of international partners. We are working very hard with partners in the European Union, the United States and Switzerland. In addition, we are working more and more with the African states that border the DRC.

You have to understand that a crisis in the DRC has a major effect on the nine countries with which it shares a border. As the ambassador, I invite the other ambassadors to the Canadian ambassador's residence in order to determine how we can jointly exert pressure that will result in adherence to the constitution.

As you said, this government is very nationalistic and not at all open to international assistance. However, I believe that, given the increasing pressure we are collectively exerting, they will eventually have to listen to reason. At least, that is my hope.

● (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: How successful...? If you were to assess the efforts of the international community, at least the part that involves Switzerland and ourselves—and it could be the United States or some European nations or countries—how far are we from achieving at least some point where we believe that this is really going to make a difference and get the country back on track in the next so many years? How optimistic are you?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Simard: As I am very optimistic by nature, I will be careful about what I am about to say.

Let me give you a concrete example. President Kabila has postponed the elections for two years. His regular mandate expired on December 20, 2016. First, he postponed the elections to 2017, then to 2018. However, following the international pressure from Canada, the United States, the European Union and the African nations in the region, he ended up publishing an electoral calendar last November, and the main steps of that calendar have been observed.

If that effort had not been made and if the government had been left to its own devices, the elections would probably have been postponed again to 2019 or 2020, or the calendar would never have been published.

I feel that those kinds of results can be achieved by becoming involved. Canada is playing a major role in becoming involved with other actors.

[*English*]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I'm done.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Saini, please.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming here today and providing your insight.

One of the questions I have is about elections, and you've talked about elections. Usually, elections in mature democracies are fought over ideas, but in Africa that is the furthest thing.... Elections there usually are fought over power and resources, but tribalism also has a huge impact, whereby one clan or one tribe will try to subsume the other minority tribes.

It seems to me that we talk about democracy and we try to have an impact there by making sure that elections are free and fair, but one thing that we have not tried to do—and I'm not saying Canada in general, I'm talking about the global community—in those countries that have fragile democracies or are fragile states is to change the way they do democracy, so that rather than having elections fought on tribalism or clans, their democracy would be fought on ideas, on a platform.

It seems to me that all of the violence, all of the inner strife in those countries, and the plundering of resources, even in those democratic states, starts from the issue of power that has been obtained not through ideas but because of someone being the more popular tribal leader or clan leader. Has there been any attempt to change the way they do democracy in those countries?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: It's a very good question. In fact, as I mentioned at the beginning, it's the sort of thing we do behind closed doors, but quite intensely and quite systematically. I'll give you a couple of illustrations.

In Somalia, I would say that the best champions and advocates of what you're saying are indeed typically those six Canadian Somali members of cabinet, because they're bringing Canadian values with them. I've heard them say, directly out of their mouths, that their experience.... One of them, for instance, worked for the City of Ottawa as a public servant for a municipal service. He's trying to bring into the construction of a civil service in Somalia some of the things he learned at the City of Ottawa in terms of client service and listening to taxpayers about the quality of public services.

We have people who come from the private sector in the Canadian Somali community who are bringing with them also a more pragmatic results-oriented approach. Many of them are certainly sharing with us the fact that inside the cabinet of this emerging new government in Somalia they are promoting exactly these sorts of values. A good counter on the clan-based system is in fact what they're working on right now, quite courageously and, let's face it, with some difficulty, to indeed move away from this clan-based system to get to one person, one vote. That's now at least agreed on in principle.

The way they're hoping to go there is to use a combination of, in some ways, their own interpretations or adaptations of what we call federalism. It will never be something we can transpose directly, but I can tell you that they have a million questions for us. Their Minister of Planning came to see me, for instance, right here in Ottawa in my office. I'm an economist by training. He was asking me questions about basic macroeconomic management. He was asking questions about how to work out a system for political parties that indeed represent policies, values, and approaches. Sometimes they're also kind of regional, but not necessarily clan- or tribal-based.

A lot of what you're saying is happening. We're doing a lot of facilitation and encouragement on that, but in Somalia, for instance, it is so sensitive that if someone who looks like me, with a Canada flag pin on my jacket, were to walk into that conversation, we could well ruin the sauce, which is why we work behind the scenes.

● (1630)

Mr. Raj Saini: This is not my opinion, but it's something that I think is an interesting idea. A lot of African scholars have suggested that, because of some of the boundaries of certain countries, certain tribes were included or not included. Maybe one way to make certain areas more peaceful is to change the borders so that certain clans or certain tribes are included, people who had been disenfranchised in another country one way or the other. Is that a potential idea?

If you look at clan violence, and you look at the borders, a lot of these borders were from 50, 75, or 100 years ago, and they were arbitrary. Maybe realign the borders. I don't know how it would work, but it's an interesting idea. Maybe the borders would be realigned to make sure that tribes or clans of the same thinking or idea would be in one part, and maybe clans or tribes that should have been somewhere else could be readjusted somewhere else.

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: I'll refer you to the colonizers of Europe who created that map.

Quite seriously, it's something that we are trying to work on, but to do that sort of thing, you have to work locally, very locally. In South Sudan, for instance, a horrible place on this planet, we're working locally—I mentioned churches earlier, for instance—with churches and women's groups to get people of different clans or other self-identification to learn how to share natural resources, for instance, or to jointly come to the training that we provide, that we subsidize, that we finance through our organizations. Sometimes being side by side and learning things together will improve all of their well-being. You also unite in a peace conference, but you create a foundation that is part of it.

We especially focus on youth as well, because let's face it, the countries we're talking about are essentially led by male gerontocracies. By working increasingly, as we are, with young people, we are also trying to work at a new start, in effect, that will go in that direction, but it's going to take a lot of time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saini.

We'll go to Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's an honour to be here today. I'm going to ask just a couple of specific questions about our approach to development assistance, and then I'll hand it over to Mr. O'Toole.

In terms of the discussion about feminist international development assistance, I want to ask if Canada ever funds medical procedures or other activities that are illegal in the country where they're taking place.

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Does the Government of Canada fund organizations that themselves perform procedures that are illegal in a particular country to do other projects?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: I'm not sure I understand. Could you restate that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, so organization X performs illegal abortions in certain countries, let's say. Would the Government of Canada fund organization X to do something else in that country, or would it choose not to partner with that organization as a result of the fact that they're involved in activity that's illegal in the country where it's happening?

● (1635)

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: Certainly, what I can tell you is that the way we work is, we start from the local context, including the local laws. Obviously, we are an arm of the Canadian government, so we function in a system of laws. We always respect local laws. To the extent that a project is devised in any country, in country X, if the laws say certain things are permitted and certain things are not permitted, any project designed to be implemented in that country will respect those laws. The partners that will be selected to implement these projects will have to respect those laws. That's how we work.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The partners you are engaging with, are you saying they would have to respect local laws in general, or just that they would have to respect local laws in the specific context of the project on which they are co-operating with the Government of Canada?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: The way these transactions work, if you are a Canadian organization, some NGO, non-governmental organization, if you work in a country where we're going to finance a project, as the project gets examined, there are many criteria including, is it well designed, is the budget well-constructed, does it have credible results, are the results commensurate with the investment? Among these many filters, these processes ensure that we work with partners who always respect those laws.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I want to clarify that I understand. You are saying that the Government of Canada would not partner with an organization that does not respect local laws, even if the specific project does respect local laws. In the case I used of the organization X, which is doing illegal abortions in a particular country, you would choose not to partner with that organization even if the potential project for partnership is something totally unrelated.

Is that correct?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: The short answer is that we would not work with an organization that is doing anything illegal in a country where we work.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Would you work with an organization that breaks local laws in a different country, if it is an international organization?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: I honestly don't know how to answer that. If an organization, let's say the ABC volunteer health organization of southern Toronto wants to work with us in South Sudan in the health sector, we of course have a due diligence process about the credibility of the organization, including its financial credibility and the design of the project. As I said, there's a series of filters we do for all projects.

If with other funding of other people they have done other things somehow, I can't imagine how one would address that. I just don't understand how we would....

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

I will turn it over to Mr. O'Toole at this point.

Thanks.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you very much for your presentation.

In the time we have left, with respect to the Democratic Republic of Congo, certainly its largest percentage of GDP by export is mining and resource extraction. Obviously, conflict and the various struggles for peace have seen that industry go on and off in terms of international participation, but Canada being a leader in this, could you talk about any examples of economic diplomacy in action? That was a focus of the last government, but I think it still makes sense where we see industry players combined with foreign aid assistance, trade, development, and that sort of thing.

Are there any examples from any of the countries, but the DRC in particular?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicolas Simard: Thank you for your question.

Actually, in the DRC, the Canadian embassy is very active in the area of mining. As you know, since the departments of foreign affairs, trade and development were merged, we work on those issues under a unified umbrella.

Of course, it is extremely difficult for a company to do business in the DRC because the DRC government is not only illegitimate but, unfortunately, it is also predatory. Efforts are made in the mining industry to try to divert mining resources from the public coffers or from export.

In those cases, we have to provide Canadian companies with support in order to put pressure on the ministries involved to comply with the country's laws, and we are succeeding in that. Often, they do not even abide by their own laws. So we provide that support. At the embassy, for example, we meet with entrepreneurs and chief executives in the mining sector. They tell us which challenges they are facing in the country, what might be called the "administrative minefield". We try to navigate through the administrative minefield together.

For example, I often go to see the minister of mines, and other ministers, such as the economic minister, to explain the situation to them. By exerting pressure in a teaching role, things generally work quite well.

● (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: If I may complement that, in South Sudan and Somalia, sadly in many ways, Canadian private sector presence either doesn't go there because they are afraid, with good reason, or when they go, we don't know about it. We do hear, certainly, that there are some people who do go, but in a private capacity. They don't register with us.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Duncan, please.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Thank you very much. I appreciate a few more questions. I'm looking forward to the briefing if we can finally get our dates straight.

I understood in the response to some of the other questions about Somalia that some of the assistance is Canada supporting Canadian NGOs, which in turn go to the African countries to deliver aid. If that's so, I'm really happy to hear that, because there was a time when that funding was cut, when we didn't have communities working directly with communities. I've always found that is among the most valid, reliable aid because then it's not some government official or some highly paid consultant going in.

Is my understanding correct that in South Sudan some of the work that is going on is to a certain extent Canada supporting Canadian-based NGOs working directly with, for example, some of the women's organizations or women in communities in South Sudan?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: We do that.

In fact, there's an entire side of our programs at Global Affairs Canada, which we call the partnerships for development innovation branch, that is exactly designed for that. Let's say you have CARE Canada or Oxfam that designs a project to work in any sector in South Sudan, involving local community partners. They will raise their own money and they will come to us to match their money.

We also have something a little more pointed. One fascinating example that I found in these difficult places to work, is the work of midwives for instance. We have worked with the Canadian Association of Midwives, for instance, where you will literally then have midwives from Kenora in northern Ontario volunteering to go deploy in places like that to then help train some of these people.

We are looking at expanding that model because it, to train midwives, is one of the things that is absolutely the best bang for your buck.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I'm happy to hear that because I know women in the Northwest Territories who have initiated midwifery and have really improved the situation for northern women.

You might want to be thinking about giving them an opportunity —although they are very busy in the Northwest Territories—because their circumstances and isolation in rural communities may well be very similar, as opposed to doing it in Toronto or Vancouver, or whatever.

I'm very interested in Canadian aid for good governance. I worked in Jamaica, Indonesia, and Bangladesh on environmental projects. Essentially what it was about was good governance and trying to put in place systems. Of course, you do the financial system. You do anti-corruption, but there's also actually working right down to the lower level in teaching them how you do protocols, matching up with Canadian counterparts and so forth.

I'm wondering how much of the percentage of aid that is going to Africa is actually on good governance. How do you actually run a local government? How do you engage the community in that direction?

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: It's a very broad question. Frankly, to be completely truthful I would have to go dig up some statistics from our master volume. But I can certainly give you a quick overview.

If you look at all international development partners who work in sub-Saharan Africa, Canada has one of the very highest percentages of the work that you're alluding to. We're working with governance at national levels, helping craft national laws, and providing technical assistance—actually, some of you may know this—to parliaments. We've worked with the parliamentary centre in a number of countries. We've also used the Canadian Auditor General model and implanted it in a number of countries including places where I've worked in my life: Ethiopia, Mali, Ghana and so on. There's a lot of that.

We also work with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in many countries, including the dimension I mentioned earlier. You were talking about moving away from tribal and clan and so on, where taking a more geographic approach with people who are of different affiliations gives you a different approach. Looking at it from a municipal level is in many ways a lot easier. You want get the water to come clean at the end of the pipe, and you can more easily surmount things like tribal and clan and other political differences when you're talking about something like that. It's very tangible. It's very concrete. We've supported user groups and associations, for instance, for water and so on.

There are many of these things we do. I don't have the numbers for all what we do in sub-Saharan Africa, but it is considerable and it takes many forms.

● (1645)

Ms. Linda Duncan: My final question is on ebola for the DRC.

My understanding is that Canada is going to step up and provide some assistance. Is that additional or is that just redirected aid?

Mr. Nicolas Simard: Thank you for the question.

Yes. Minister Bibeau has announced an additional contribution of $2.5 million recently for responding to the crisis. This is with WHO and UNICEF.

[*Translation*]

Doctors without Borders and the Humanitarian Air Service of the United Nations World Food Program.

So the response has been quite fast. Actually, there was an extremely rapid international mobilization in response to the crisis, to contain it inside the province of Equateur, and to prevent it from spreading. Currently, the WHO has established a national funding plan of $52 million American dollars. It receives 100% funding, which is very rare in humanitarian assistance. Having 100% funding for requests is extremely rare. So there has been a major response.

Another $2.5 million have been added, but international mechanisms were already in place and we have used them since the beginning of the crisis in order to respond to it.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

Colleagues, that will wrap up the time.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank our officials for this good start to a very important discussion. We may take the opportunity to invite you back at some point as we work our way through this, but on behalf of the committee, Mr. Fredette, Ambassador Simard, Mr. Parenteau, and Ms. Greene, thank you very much for your participation here today.

Colleagues, we're going to suspend for a few minutes, and then we'll go in camera and do a little bit of business before the end of the day.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Fredette: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll take a few minutes to suspend and ask people to clear the room.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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